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CONTACT: Mark Daley (202) 225-5235

"Farming in the New Millennium"

by Congressman Allen Boyd

This past week, Congress took an abeyance from legislative business to offer members a chance to return home to celebrate Independence Day. I spent much of the week working at my family farm in Monticello. Throughout the week, I visited many of my neighbors and fellow farmers. They reiterated what I have been telling my colleagues in Washington since I arrived here, America needs a new plan of attack to strengthen our agriculture industry.

In the wake of NAFTA and the 1996 Farm Bill, America's agriculture industry now, more than ever, needs the proper tools to ensure its survival in this new age of economics. While many Americans sip their Starbucks' mocha lattes and watch as Wall Street brokers are replaced by online investors, we, the farmers of North Florida, are cognizant of the importance the agriculture industry still plays in the economy of our nation. Just because the name of our farm is not followed by the ever popular suffix "dot com," our value to the national economy has not depreciated.

Over the past three years, the United States' copious supply of agriculture commodities and the consistently low demand for them from foreign markets has forced the congress to appropriate billions of dollars in "emergency funding." The end result is that in this booming economy the necessary provisions to ensure the economic stability and prosperity of farmers are not in place and bailing them out is costing taxpayers billions of dollars. This only strengthens my argument that we need to implement a farm policy that is rooted in the framework of a fiscally responsible and balanced budget.

This week the House of Representatives passed the Agriculture Appropriations bill. In addition to funding the Department of Agriculture's nutrition programs - Food Stamps and Women Infant and Children (WIC) - this bill included funding for several programs that directly benefit farmers and commerce in Florida. The bill includes \$5 million in research funding for the detection and eradication of citrus canker and \$5 million for a research program at the University of Florida and the University of Hawaii for the purpose of developing strategies and tactics to stem the influx of exotic diseases, insects and weeds in the United States. In addition, the bill allocates \$400,000 for a research program at the University of Florida to develop a means of eradicating Diaprepes Root Weevil and \$300,000 for North Florida Community College to establish the

Environmental Horticulture Education Institute/Green Industry Education Institute at the University of Florida facility in Monticello. Moreover, the bill continues to fund research at the Florida Aquaculture Farm, in Blountstown.

As a fiscal conservative, I believe the federal government should live within its means. The historic Balanced Budget Agreement reached in 1997 and the higher than estimated growth in the economy has helped us realize a balanced budget sooner than projected. It is time we seize this opportunity and develop a policy which supports our hard working farmers and enables them to continue to supply our country, and the world, with the highest quality, safest, and most affordable food supply available.